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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 006508

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SUBJECT: NEW MOD CAMILO OSPINA DISCUSSES BILATERAL
RELATIONSHIP

REF: AMB WOOD E-MAIL JUL8 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood; reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) On July 9, the newly-appointed Minister of Defense Camilo Ospina visited the Ambassador to discuss bilateral military cooperation. They discussed a range of issues including human rights, high value targets, funding for military assistance, and the Justice and Peace Law. Ospina stated that capturing high value targets and reforming the military justice system by December were his top priorities as minister. He agreed that human rights improvements were critical for ongoing bilateral cooperation. End summary.

2. (C) Camilo Ospina, the new Minister of National Defense (MOD) paid a visit to the Ambassador, DCM, and Emboffs from Political, the Defense Attache Office, and Military Group on July 9 to discuss bilateral military assistance and "receive a briefing on his new job." Following the long-awaited resignation of Jorge Uribe as Minister of Defense on July 8, Ospina was selected to assume control over military and police policy and to leave his position as Presidential Legal Advisor. This is Ospina's first ministerial position. He told the Ambassador that he did not intend to change the personnel who were working successfully at the ministry. Ospina is a close confidant of President Uribe and a favorite contact and problem solver for the embassy.

Military Justice Reform and Human Rights Improvements

3. (C) The Ambassador underscored the importance of military justice reform and human rights improvements. He told Ospina that military justice had to become reliable and have trustworthy investigative and prosecutorial capabilities. He raised the Cajamarca case as an example, which implicated seven Army officials in the murder of six civilians, yet was still pending resolution fifteen months later. Ospina agreed and vowed to complete reforms by December. He stated that he either had to fix military justice by the end of the year or temporarily turn it over to the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia).

4. (C) Respect for human rights and accurate military justice are cornerstones for our bilateral military cooperation, stressed the Ambassador. He also stressed the importance, and binding nature, of the vetting process. He requested Ospina's help in continuing to improve the Colombian military's (COLMIL) respect for human rights, starting with military justice reform and human rights certification. Ospina confirmed that human rights would be a key issue for him during his tenure.

High Value Targets

5. (S) Ospina expressed concerns about the terrorist groups' capabilities in Colombia and asserted that capturing a Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) Secretariat member was his highest priority as Minister. He asked to be notified directly if the Embassy noticed specific COLMIL shortcomings that allowed high value targets (HVTs) to evade authorities. He requested an assessment on FARC communications and COLMIL communication capabilities. Ospina underscored the need for a successful HVT mission soon, both to undermine FARC morale and to offset FARC actions in the run-up to elections.

Implementing Justice and Peace Law

6. (C) The Ambassador insisted that the Justice and Peace Law, once signed by President Uribe, be used to prosecute paramilitary criminals currently in Rialito. The law should be implemented in such a way that beneficiaries would begin

their prison terms within the next month and serve several years in prison for their crimes. Ospina agreed and reported that President Uribe planned to sign the law on July 20. Ospina added that he was willing to travel to Washington DC sometime the week of July 11 to discuss the law with U.S. officials.

COLMIL Capabilities

17. (C) Ospina specifically asked about the COLMIL's capabilities to combat landmines, to secure replacement parts on aircraft, and to maintain bilateral cooperation funding levels. The Milgroup Commander and Defense Attache responded that countermining teams were well trained and equipped, but that the increase in plastic landmines had made detection more difficult. Parts for Blackhawk helicopters were in short supply, but the majority of Colombian helicopters would be serviceable since the COLMIL had mostly UH-1s. The Ambassador said Colombia was a high priority for U.S. military assistance and that funding had remained constant over the last four years and would probably continue. The Ambassador and the MilGrp Commander stressed the importance of joint training, logistics, and equipment maintenance. Further, they emphasized recent COLMIL/U.S. initiatives to reduce redundant training and maintenance programs across services.

Comment

18. (C) In his capacity as Presidential Legal Advisor, Ospina has been a close, good friend of the embassy and one of the President's problem solvers. He will be in a good position now to focus on HVTs and human rights issues, especially military justice reform. Ospina's limited English will change the way we deal with visitors.
WOOD